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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3986
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5572
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LA PAZ 001425

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [KTIA](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN BILAT MILITARY/POLICE DISENGAGEMENT

REF: A. LA PAZ 983

[1B.](#) LA PAZ 99

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary. Bolivian President Evo Morales called on police to stop working with the United States June 24, casting doubt on government assurances to ensure Mission security. In the last two weeks the government canceled Bolivian participation in a U.S.-sponsored hemisphere-wide special forces competition and closed our military liaison office. With constant speculation about coup-plotting, public and private government leaders urging disengagement, and endorsements of Embassy protests, our security force contacts are increasingly skittish with us. End Summary.

Evo to Police: Stop Being a Tool of the "Empire"

[12.](#) (U) At a June 24 event marking the 182nd anniversary of the Bolivian National Police (BNP), President Evo Morales urged the police to cut their "dependency" on the USG and to distance themselves from the United States and the Embassy: "In years past we have heard that there were some (police) groups used by the empire, used by the U.S. Embassy. I want to tell you that this has to end. We are a country...that certainly has many economic problems and many social problems but we have to begin to dignify ourselves in this way: by serving the people and not serving the interests of others, external interests."

[13.](#) (U) Despite this appeal to national sovereignty free from external involvement, President Morales presided over a parade of equipment donated by Venezuela (USG donations were also present in the parade, but not noted). During the celebration, President Morales and BNP General Miguel Gemio awarded the Venezuelan Embassy a BNP medal to Venezuelan Army General Aguero for Venezuela's support and cooperation with the BNP.

Liaison Relationship Ends; Officers Reassigned

[14.](#) (C) In the last two weeks, we experienced a new round of bilateral disengagement from the Bolivian military since the Bolivian government banned military personnel from attending

the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Cooperation (WHINSEC) in January (reftel b). The most onerous was the sudden closing of our military liaison office via delivery to our Military Group offices June 18 of an official note from Armed Forces Commander Gen. Luis Trigo (dated June 17). In the letter, Trigo flatly requests we route our military coordination through the military commanders of Bolivian intelligence (J2) and International Affairs (J6) to ensure "maximum efficiency." Trigo's letter concludes that this arrangement makes the U.S.-Bolivian Liaison Office "unnecessary" and that the three Bolivian liaison officers (LNOs) will be reassigned.

¶15. (C) Although MilGrp was originally told our liaison office at the Joint Staff Headquarters would be closed, we received assurances from Vice Minister of Defense Wilfredo Vargas and Trigo on June 20 that we could retain the office space. Embassy MilGrp is considering setting up regular hours to use the office as a meeting point for military contacts to offer a venue that is more convenient and less politically sensitive than meeting at the Embassy. According to MilGrp Commander, the LNO closure constitutes a significant downgrade to a traditionally close bilateral military liaison relationship, but that the resulting bilateral arrangement is typical in most countries. MilGrp Commander adds the move is consistent with a new Bolivian military emphasis to route decision-making in general through the joint staff. One of the Bolivian LNO's has been telling MilGrp privately that such a change has been in the works for weeks, due to suspicions that the existing officers are too close to the

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USG.

UnRSVPed on Special Forces Competition

¶16. (C) On June 16, General Trigo ordered seven Bolivian military personnel to cancel plans to attend a U.S.-sponsored hemisphere-wide special operations competition in Texas. The trip was called off at the last minute and the proposed participants were pulled off of the plane. No official explanation has been provided. Army Commander Gen. Freddy Mackay told MilGrp the order stems from Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana's concerns we were using the trip as a cover to cultivate military officers for conspiracy against the government. The decision has not impacted Bolivian participation in other U.S.-sponsored training or events, although we will not know for certain whether this is an isolated incident or a sign of things to come until we send invitations to the military for new activities.

High Command: Watch This Space

¶17. (C) Rumors are circulating about changes in the military's high command, prompting cooler relations, at least temporarily, with some of our senior-ranking military contacts. According to MilGrp contacts, General MacKay assembled the army's leading generals the week of June 16 to warn them he may be forced from command and to ask them how they would react to such an action. Gen. Mackay has been the frequent subject of coup rumors on Internet blogs and within government rumormills, but we have no concrete intelligence that his ouster is imminent. (Comment: To the best of our knowledge, these rumors are unfounded. End Comment.)

¶18. (C) Gen. Trigo, who has had a cordial relationship and an open line with our Defense Attach, did not return his calls the week of June 16. Despite his overtly pro-government public statements and appearances, Trigo's job security remains tenuous following a slew of corruption allegations, a bizarre assassination attempt on his life, embarrassing military retreats from customs-enforcement and presidential-escort operations, and wide-spread criticisms of his tenure in both the military and Department of Defense.

Uninvites and Continued Chilliness Expected

¶ 9. (C) Although contacts at the Ministry of Defense remain accessible, we have noticed a decrease in accessibility to military contacts and a slowness and/or reluctance to provide us with even perfunctory information, for example lists for equipment requests and training. MilGrp has not been invited to formal army functions since 2008's change of command. Most recently the MilGrp Commander was explicitly not invited to the anniversary of the Bolivian 1st Army Division last week at the instruction of Gen. Mackay.

¶ 10. (C) Interest in concluding bilateral agreements on assistance for international peace-keeping and status of U.S. forces operating in assistance missions appears to have fallen completely off the government radar. MilGrp contacts assert no high-level exchanges will be entertained until Bolivian President Evo Morales receives a formal apology from SouthCom Commander Admiral James Stavridis for allegedly implying Morales was a narco-terrorist during a January 17 PowerPoint presentation. (Note: We have addressed this misunderstanding several times with various high-ranking officials at both MOD and MFA. Reftel a. End Note.)

Comment

¶ 11. (C) The special forces competition was attended by 17 hemispheric countries. Selecting it as a coup-plotting venue shows the depths of government paranoia. High ranking

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officials including Morales himself are making it clear through word and deed that security force affiliation with the USG will not be career enhancing. We are becoming kryptonite to our security force contacts, making even routine bilateral work increasingly problematic. Coming just two weeks after the government's decision to reassign the La Paz Police Chief who commanded the successful protection of the Embassy against a violent mob, President Morales' statements prompt new doubts about the reliability of police protection for the Embassy and Mission personnel. End Comment.
URS